

# West African drumming, 'TSE TSE KULE' and the '3M' approach to using West African musics in the classroom: 1

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*Although titled 'West African Drumming', the workshop dealt with a holistic approach to teaching West African musics through the use of movement, mnemonics and an aural-oral teaching process.*

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## Aims

To introduce teachers to:

- ✓ drum ensemble musics from West Africa
- ✓ principles and procedures (mnemonics) used by traditional African music teachers
- ✓ the (Robert Kwami) '3M' (from mnemonics – to movement - to music) approach to using African musics in the classroom.

## Objectives

To model the '3M' approach using musics from West Africa – namely: (1) *Tse tse kule*, a Ghanaian children's activity, (2) the Gota dance (3) the slow Agbadza dance and (4) the Kpanlogo dance.

## Introductions, background and context

First, the performance contexts of 'Tse tse kule' and the dances were outlined. Performances are holistic - they involve an integration of the arts including singing, playing (of instruments) dancing, dramatisation and the involvement of an active, participant audience. Such contexts are not easy to replicate in the classroom; indeed, the intention should be cultural transposition rather than replication. The transposition can be done with due regard to sensitivity on three grounds – with respect to (1) social and cultural context, (2) in the use of (appropriate) teaching strategies, and (3) in the use of resources (see Kwami, 2001a).

It is important to be able to abstract elements sensitively so as to retain the essence of a traditional holistic performance in the classroom setting. Of course, classroom performances are unlikely to combine all aspects. The tendency is to concentrate on vocal and instrumental music making – on the singing and 'drumming'.

Another aspect of the traditional context is that of socialisation or enculturation as a learning process. However, this aspect may be difficult to transpose into a formal educational setting. Over a period of about 20 years, I have been exploring ways of bridging the enculturation process in the classroom context by the employment of transmission processes used by traditional musicians. In this respect, I have found my 3M approach, involving the use of movement, mnemonics and aural-oral methods for internalisation purposes, to be particularly successful.

In addition to setting the context, it is important, where appropriate, to note that in using African music models (1) the work needs to provide opportunities for improvisation and creative music making and (2) aural-oral teaching methods including the use of the rote method.

## Procedure – Process – Methodology

### *TSE TSE KULE*

1. Teach *Tse tse kule* (see below) using the rote method by (a) reciting the words, line by line (b) singing the song (c) adding movements – such as marching, raising hands above the head and down at the sides, in a rhythm, using simple dance steps. You lead, the class copies or echoes.

♩ = 80 transcribed by R Kwami

CALL RESPONSE/ECHO

Tse tse ku- le, tse tse ku- le,  
 Tse tse Ko- fi sa, tse tse Ko- fi sa,  
 Ko- fi Sa- la- ga, Ko- fi Sa- la- ga,  
 La- ga- ti la- ga, la- ga- ti la- ga,  
 Tum A- de- ne, tum A- de- ne.

*Pronunciation Guide*

Chay chay koo-lay,  
 Chay chay koo-lay,  
 Chay Chay coe-fee-saa,  
 Coe-fee Saa -laa-gaa.  
 Laa-gaa-tee laa-gaa  
 Toom Aa-day-nay.

*Explanation*

This nonsense song has words from a number of West African languages including Hausa. 'Kofi' is the name of a boy born on Friday; 'Salaga' is the name of a town in Ghana. It used to have a famous slave market. And, among the Ga people of Ghana, people, 'Adene' is the name of a girl.

- When the song can be performed confidently with actions, divide the class into four groups as follows: group 1 = Tse tse kule; group 2 = Tse tse Kofi sa; group 3 = Tum Adene; group 4 = two (regular) pulses (e.g. mouthed as 'tsa' in the space for 'Tse tse kule').
- Starting with the regular pulse pattern, get pupils to recite the parts repetitively. Build up the ensemble by getting the parts to come in one by one. Do this by using the LIFO (last in first out) and FIFO (first in first out) methods (see below). You can also introduce fading, getting louder, and using a signal to end the music.

Part 1 \_\_\_\_\_

Part 2 \_\_\_\_\_

Part 3 \_\_\_\_\_

Part 4 \_\_\_\_\_

Part 5 \_\_\_\_\_

**LIFO structure**

Part 1 \_\_\_\_\_

Part 2 \_\_\_\_\_

Part 3 \_\_\_\_\_

## Part 4

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## Part 5

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### FIFO structure

4. When fluent, you can divide the class into smaller groups to practise. Then introduce instruments, making sure of balance and differentiation in terms of the pitch dimension, to create variety and interest.
5. For more advanced pupils, or as part of the refinement and extension processes responsorial form, variation techniques and dynamics can be introduced into the versions created by the groups.
6. When the pieces have been refined, record, review, evaluate/assess them with the class, as appropriate.

See Appendix 1 for more notes on teaching Tse Tse Kule.

#### *Some activities for the primary curriculum*

1. Pupils can use phrases from an African children's story to create a vocal and/or instrumental group piece.
2. Pupils could create their own group song or rap based on an African or other story. Then they can use their music in dramatising the story.

#### **Appendix:**

##### GOTA

1. Start by teaching the fast double bell pattern by counting '1 – 2 & 3 & 4 &' with hands making contact with both laps (see Appendix 2) as follows:  
Count 1 & 2 & 3 & 4 &  
Hand s sw sw sw  
Lap s w w sw w w  
(s = strong and w = weak)
2. Once secure, introduce the rattle and big drum parts (see Appendix 2).
3. Choose competent pupils to play the bell part in a class performance combining the three parts.
4. Let pupils to make their own group versions.
5. As an extension exercise, you can teach the 'Laila' song (see Appendix 4) to which a Gota accompaniment (see Appendix 5) can be added.
6. An extra dimension is master drumming (see QCA, 2000, 'Unit 9 - Music for Dance' for some patterns and some other ideas on extending the work; see also, Wiggins, 1993).

##### AGBADZA

1. Teach the mnemonics for the rattle part by rote (see Appendix 2). It is advisable to split this into two parts: (a) 'pati-papa' and (b) 'tipa-tipa-tipa pa (rest)'.  
Note: It is a vital aspect of the internalisation and enculturative process that the mnemonics are recited in time with the movements/actions.
2. Once the whole pattern is secure, add hand movements: pa = strong hand on lap; ti = strong hand makes contact with weak hand raised about 25 centimetres above the lap.  
Note: It is a vital aspect of the internalisation and enculturative process that the mnemonics are recited in time with the movements/actions.
3. Next, introduce bell part as the 'pa' sounds of the rattle part. Note that the bell pattern or cycle starts on the last sound of the rattle part!
4. Divide the class into two and get one group to play the rattle part and the other the bell part.

5. The performance can be done without instruments, with the rattle part players doing the actions described above while the bell players clap the 'pa' sounds, with the final one being a tap or slap on the lap. Then, instruments can be used. If authentic instruments are lacking, this should be no deterrent; substitutes such as maracas (for two rattles) and glockenspiels or wooden agogos (for the double clapperless bell) can be used to good effect.
6. Next, introduce the small drum part as 'tipepe' (um-pah-pah) where the 'pe' sounds are played (i.e. 'midzo' [let's go]), and make sure that the 'ti' sounds are silent. Note that the pattern is repeated four times in one bell/rattle cycle.
7. Now, put all three parts together making sure that the 'ti' of the small drum part starts in time with the low bell.
8. You can introduce a simple medium drum part played only on the 'ti' sounds of the mnemonics for the little drum (see Appendix 6).
9. Divide the class into four groups and perform the music; then organise pupils into groups to make their own version of Agbadza. As part of the refinement process, pupils can add improvised master drum patterns as an extra part.

### EXTENSION WORK

- ✓ Teach the 'midzo gidi gidi, midzo koko koko' (Let's go certainly, let's go definitely) pattern.
- ✓ Teach master drum patterns such as the 'Va midzo' phrase (see Kwami, 1995b).
- ✓ Get pupils to stage a performance involving all the instrumental parts.
- ✓ Finally, (a) add dance movements, with 'left-right, left-right' foot movements coinciding with the 'ti' mnemonics of the little drum part; (b) teach a song, such as 'Agba yee!' (see Kwami, 1998a, page 12), to be sung with the instrumental accompaniment and the dance.

### KPANLOGO (See Kwami, 1990)

1. Teach the mnemonics for the bell pattern (see Appendix 3) with pupils standing in a circle and marking time and counting from 1 to 4. Teach the mnemonics by the rote method in bits, in a cumulative way.
2. Once the bell pattern is internalised, introduce the mnemonics for the other instruments (rattle, small drum, supporting drum and bass drum) with pupils marching on one spot.
3. When all the parts are secure, divide the class into groups and put the parts together. This aspect of the work may take a deal of time and needs to be done in stages: (a) bell and rattle (b) add small drum (c) add bass drum part (d) add supporting drum. Note: It may also be advisable to teach the work over a number of lessons, and in shorter slots of time, on a regular basis, rather than as a one-off affair.
4. Then work out a signal to stop the whole performance – e.g. the bell pattern played three times on a big, master drum. open stroke.
10. At stage 7, it is important that a constant pulse is held so that all can keep in time. The function of the pulse keeper can be likened to the bell player or time keeper in African ensembles where a regular pulse is usually not articulated by any one performer. With more musically advanced students, it might be more appropriate to use more complex and interesting patterns to keep the pulse.
11. Stage 8 is the point where the above discussion on ensemble performances could be applied. In a basic application, it would do to describe the section where the parts enter as the beginning: normally, the parts enter on a one-by-one basis until every body is playing. The main part of the piece would then follow; this part might merely consists of each player repeating his or her pattern a number of times, or it could be more elaborate, involving a number of sub-sections and dialogue between parts and variation procedures. Finally, the ending of the piece can involve one of the procedures outlined earlier such as the use fading or a signal.

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Appendix 2: African Musics Workshop

Appendix 3: 'Laila' (Salaam Aleikum) Song to be Accompanied by Gota Drumming

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## NOTES

1. I learnt the song when a child growing up in Ghana. The song can be sung in unison and/or as a round, in which case the second part should start in bar 5. If harmonised, the second part should be a third below the melody. Other parts can be added as appropriate.

2. I understand that in Arabic 'Salaam Aleikum' means 'Peace be unto you'. It seems that 'Laila' is a person's (girl's) name. The song can be taught as a greeting song, at the start of a lesson and pupils can shake hands as they sing it. Also, other names can be substituted for that of 'Laila' when singing the songs.

3. Finally, add Gota rattle and bell parts as follows. (See earlier notes on how the instrumental parts should be performed. For convenience, I have used conventional music notation. Note that the song, with its words, starts in bar 3:

Appendix 5: Select Bibliography, Further Reading and Listening

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WIGGINS, T (1993) Music of West Africa. London: Heinemann Educational/WOMAD.

## LISTENING

Tapes, LPs, CDs and videos are available from large music retailers. In London, the HMV and Virgin megastores in Oxford Street and Stern's at 293 Euston Road are good places to start. Some examples are:

- ✓ Drums of the Earth 1 (1992) CD, Ethnic B 6773 (track 4 features Kpanlogo music from Ghana).
- ✓ Under African Skies (ARC Music) EUCD1 127 (music from West and East Africa, performed by the traditional dancegroup Adzido).
- ✓ Africa: The Music of a Continent (Playasound) PS 66006 (a sampler which demonstrates the huge range of music to be found in Africa). Etc...